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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT DISCUSS PROGRESS,
PROBLEMS, PERCEPTIONS

REF: A. NAIROBI 1732

[B](#). NAIROBI 1735

[C](#). NAIROBI 1698

[1](#). (SBU) Summary: From August 18 - 20, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) hosted a three day parliamentary training seminar in Nairobi, Kenya for over 30 Somali Members of Parliament (MPs). On the margins of this seminar, we were able to conduct a number of insightful conversations with a cross-cutting segment of Somali MPs, many of them based in Mogadishu, on issues related to security, political trends, economic challenges, minority concerns, and MP perceptions of international involvement in Somalia. The MPs came from a variety of clans and regions within Somalia, and were involved in parliamentary committees including security, finance, religion and reconciliation. Their most pressing concerns were security and funding for basic infrastructure. End summary.

The Evolving Security Situation

[2](#). (SBU) MPs consistently highlighted security as one of their top personal and political concerns, advocating the creation of Parliament offices within a protected buffer area or green zone, in Mogadishu, and citing the lack of a safe venue for meetings. The MP,s fears were compounded by intimidation; they described phone calls threatening both MPs and their families, and they risk attacks by al-Shabaab when they travel. Sheikh Jama Hagi Hussein (Bantu), the Chairman of the Justice Committee, noted that he had been attacked by al-Shabaab in 2008, specifically targeted because he was an outspoken Sufi MP and had made a statement welcoming U.S. educational support. MP Omar Mohamud Mohammed (Hawiye, Abgal) noted that the TFG lacked the intelligence capabilities needed to protect officials, even within the limited area of government control in Mogadishu. One MP also mentioned that bounties were at times offered for killing government officials.

[3](#). (SBU) Describing the current violence in Mogadishu, numerous MPs noted a growing public hatred for al-Shabaab, which is seen as brainwashing local youth into violence. These sentiments are contributing to the formation of local TFG-aligned militias in Mogadishu neighborhoods such as Medina, and in regions outside the capital. We met with Security Committee Chairman Mohammed Husain Afarale (Dir, Isak), and Security Committee Secretary Ahmed Ali Yakhle (Darod, Harti), to discuss recent fighting. They emphasized the importance of ongoing regional efforts against al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam, such as operations by ASWJ and the fighting in Gedo, Galgadud, and Hiran in mid-August. These operations were seen as essential in relieving pressure from the TFG in Mogadishu, and prompting the withdrawal of numerous

al-Shabaab fighters, many of which were relocating out of Mogadishu back to their traditional strongholds in southern Somalia. Some MPs praised improved cooperation between the TFG and ASWJ, while others argued that the TFG still does not fully support or trust ASWJ, and that this imperfect relationship hinders security progress.

¶4. (SBU) Mohamed Omar Dalha, First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, added that government and aligned forces had recently made gains in Hiran, Gedo, Bay, and Galgadud regions and claimed the TFG had plans to push into the rest of Bay and Middle Shabelle as their next steps. He emphasized the need to rehabilitate some of the more moderate rank-and-file anti-Government insurgents, particularly following desertions by Hisbul Islam fighters, and to use influential clan and religious leaders to sensitize at-risk Somali youth and avoid future recruitment and indoctrination by al-Shabaab. Dalha noted that in the past few weeks, the failure of al-Shabaab to defeat the TFG, which he attributed to the involvement of AMISOM, had shifted the momentum in Mogadishu. He corroborated information from the Security Committee representatives that many al-Shabaab forces, including foreign fighters, fear being surrounded in Mogadishu and have consequently left the capital to relocate to more secure regions farther south, leaving primarily local al-Shabaab fighters in the capital. Dalha noted that the al-Shabaab/Hisbul Islam alliance, which was a key factor in the fighting in Mogadishu since May, was an alliance of convenience based solely on anti-TFG sentiment. The two groups disagree on most other issues, with Hisbul Islam locally focused, but dependent on al-Shabaab for power and political relevancy.

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¶5. (SBU) Of concern, Ibrahim Ali Jeebo (Hawiye, Abgal) Chairman of the Parliament's Reconciliation Committee, criticized cronyism within Sharif's government, remained unconvinced that TFG will ensure Abgal interests, and favored developing an Abgal strategy to take Hiran, Middle Shabelle, and a southern portion of Galgadud region. Jeebo plans, in the next several weeks, to organize a meeting of Abgal Imams, clan, and religious leaders to advocate this agenda, and he hopes to raise financial support from donors in the diaspora. If it moves forward, such a plan could likely undercut the TFG by creating a precedence for clan based sub-states, and potentially derail efforts by TFG President Sharif to mend fences with his Abgal co-clan members (Ref A).

MP Political Views

¶6. (SBU) The MPs had mixed views on recent TFG political progress, citing good intentions by the TFG's top leadership, and improved cooperation between the TFG's President, Prime Minister, and Speaker. However, MPs noted the lack of infrastructure and transparency, and criticized many political appointments, including a number of unqualified ministers appointed due to power alliances or clan interests rather than based on individual merit. Several MPs noted that militia leaders are able to blackmail, the President, forcing him to compensate them financially or politically for their military support. They widely described the recent TFG cabinet reshuffle as zero change, or even a potential mistake that could anger political leaders from other clans (Ref B). Mohamed Omar Dalha, First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, noted signs of political progress under President Sharif, which he attributed largely to international support from the European Union and United States, particularly emphasizing the importance of Secretary Clinton's meeting with Sharif. However, Dalha argued that the TFG needed to gradually shift current strategy, which he viewed as somewhat short-sighted and overly focused on building alliances with powerful militia leaders. According to Dalha, the TFG now needs to systematically select government positions based on merit, experience and popular support, rather than control of

arms and militia. He suggested that this would require replacing militia leaders with influential political representatives from their same clan/sub-clan.

Financial challenges

17. (SBU) MPs highlighted continued revenue problems and sporadic pay for government officials. Several MPs complained that they had not been paid in 2-5 months, and that they typically have no staff, clerks, or office space for meetings. Similar financial problems plague police and security forces, consequently increasing road blocks and criminal activities perpetrated by rogue security personnel. Unpaid individuals within TFG security forces have at times sold their weapons or ammunition in arms markets; some of these arms are likely purchased by insurgents. MPs pointed out that improved training for TFG security and police forces would likely be ineffective unless the payroll problem was resolved. Furthermore, an Abgal clan contact noted that TFG-aligned Abgal militia are largely unpaid and underfed, prompting Abgal leaders to pay their own clan militia, and hindering efforts at integration with TFG forces. Parliamentarians consistently cited the need for checks and balances to avoid corruption and insure accountability at all levels of government.

Minorities and Reconciliation

18. (SBU) Poloff also met with several MPs from minority or woman's rights committees, including Sheikh Jama Hagi Hussein, a Somali Bantu who is Chairman of the Justice Committee. Jama expressed support for the TFG from both the Bantu community and other minorities, who view a stable unity government as key to representing their concerns. Jama was pleased that several Bantus have already been given political positions, bringing them up to 14 MP slots. Likewise, Lul Abdi, a member of the Gender Committee and one of 36 women in Parliament, noted that lobbying over the past year had raised the profile and rights of women within the Government, and emphasized that women could be a strong force for reconciliation due to their ability to reach out to relatives across clan divisions.

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Perceptions of the International Community

19. (SBU) The MPs had positive perceptions of the international community, praising both U.S. support for the TFG, and AMISOM's role in halting the joint al-Shabaab/Hisbul Islam offensive against the TFG in Mogadishu from May - July. Secretary of State Clinton's August 6 meeting in Nairobi with TFG President Sharif was repeatedly raised as key to reinvigorating TFG efforts and demoralizing members of the anti-TFG opposition (Ref C). MPs urged international donors to continue directing support for anti-al-Shabaab forces through the TFG, which could then channel support to allied forces such as ASWJ. The only consistent critique of the international community's efforts was the need to support institutions, rather than individuals. Several MPs felt that the U.S. and the international community often provide support directly to TFG individuals, leading to a lack of transparency within the government, resulting in cases where Parliament was unaware of what support had been provided, and allowing recipients to use international aid without oversight. The MPs felt this impeded progress by weakening the role of government institutions. One specific example was UNDP financial aid, of which the First Deputy Speaker claimed the Parliament was able to account for only two months over the past year. MPs urged the United States and international community to increase mechanisms to insure transparency and accountability when supporting the TFG.

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